



10

The graphic features a large red number "10" centered over a background of concentric white circles on a grey field. The entire image is composed of geometric shapes in shades of blue, red, and grey, with various patterns like concentric circles and parallel lines.

Top 10 Real Estate Features Home Buyers Want Now

As the **COVID** pandemic reshapes the real estate market, agents across the country cite the top real estate needs of today's homebuyer.

10

Buyer demand is way up, inventory is still down and many homeowners are on the move in search of more space where they can work from home, entertain outdoors and cook in a kitchen that suits their new nesting needs.

During these unprecedented times, COVID and, most notably, the resulting work-from-home wave that followed has rapidly reshaped the home search criteria of the 2020 real estate listing.

While sales of webcams, office chairs, patio furniture, trampolines and gym equipment are way up with many on back order, sales of new cars, watches, luggage and commercial real estate are way down. Modern farmhouse chic? Still in. Fixer uppers? Definitely out in terms of what will move a home fast.

A few significant themes have emerged since the onset of the pandemic. For one, a premium has been placed on turnkey, move-in ready real estate, meaning little if any renovation needed.

“Buyers today want everything done with no upgrades needed,” says BHHS Florida Properties Group agent Tammy Waugh. “They want the kitchen done, the bathrooms done, because they don’t have the time or cash to do it themselves. They would rather have those things mortgaged into the home,” says Waugh.

Two, homeowners are placing greater emphasis on the outdoor and perimeter area around their homes as a means of maximizing their living space.

Third, open floor plans, once a common desirable home feature, are on the way out as more people seek privacy within partitioned spaces now designated for distance-learning students or working parents attending Zoom sessions.

Recently, we surveyed agents across the country on top features their buyers are looking for in today's market. Each description is followed by buzzwords or phrases to help you create real estate listings that get action.



HOME OFFICE





BUZZWORDS

Home Office

“Zoom Room”

Work Space

HOME OFFICE

Anyone who has tried to order a desk or work chairs recently most likely learned first-hand how in demand home offices are this year as America shifts to a work-from-home work model. Across the country, homeowners are converting lofts, garages and small sheds to work space.

The trend, says Zillow Director of Broker Relations Matt Hendricks, is most likely to continue. “Home offices are an absolute must. Even if we have a chance to go back to work, the quality of life for most people working from home has been so much better that many don’t want to go back.”

According to the Brookings Institution, about half of the U.S. workforce worked from home during the COVID shelter-in-place shutdowns — that’s twice as many compared to 2017-18. Many companies, including Twitter, Google, Morgan Stanley and Facebook, have announced they will allow staffers to continue working from home indefinitely at least part of the time, leading other businesses to follow.

One way to get potential buyers’ attention:

Stage an extra bedroom in the house as a home office.



SALES UP ↑

Webcams
Desks
Office Chair

SALES DOWN ↓

Commercial Space



SPEEDY INTERNET





SPEEDY INTERNET

What makes the perfect complement to a home office? High-speed internet access, of course. With many students and their parents working and learning within the same house, it's no longer a nice-to-have — it's a must-have.

As a result, agents report fielding more questions about internet speed as buyers view the new home office as their essential work zone. Comey & Shepherd agent Sue Wahl notes that in Cincinnati, where kids are still attending class online, there remains a large population who do not have access to good Wifi.

“A good Wifi connection is very important now, especially with so many properties out of the city. People are asking about the internet connection all the time. ‘Is the Internet connection solid? Is it fast?’”

Internet speed is based on how much data the connection can download (download speeds) or upload (upload speeds) per second. Per the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), a broadband internet connection has a minimum download speed of 25 Mbps and a minimum upload speed of 3 Mbps. An internet speed at or above 25 Mbps will support most online activity, such as downloading music, HD streaming, gaming and web browsing, while anything 100 Mbps or higher is considered fast and will support multiple devices and users simultaneously.

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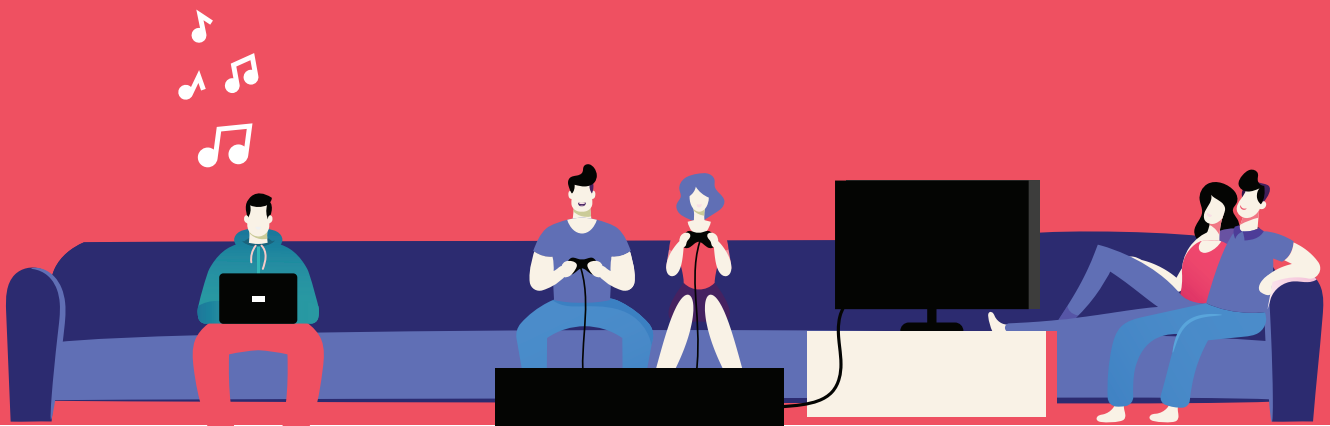
25⁺ Mbps

internet speed supports most online activity
including

Downloading Music

HD Streaming

Gaming & Web Browsing



HOME GYMS





HOME GYMS

Gym equipment, including water bottles, yoga mats and exercise bands, are also topping the trending products of 2020 ever since COVID started shutting down gym operations.

Demand has been particularly high for smart exercise equipment, like Peloton bikes, and online fitness programs as consumers try to replicate the gym experience at home.

Many city dwellers who were first lured to a high-rise condo or apartment for its gym and other building amenities increasingly opted for housing with gym space once their condo amenities closed.

In fact, according to a report by ResearchAndMarkets.com on the health and wellness industry, fitness equipment sales have grown by a whopping 170%.

But just designating any room for a home gym won't seal the deal for the knowledgeable workout enthusiast. Sellers need to consider features like lighting, ventilation and flooring. Also, having enough dedicated power outlets for exercise machines in the room can help avoid outlet overload.

TRENDING

Gym Equipment

Water Bottles

Yoga Mats & Exercise Bands



170% growth in sales of fitness equipment**



OUTDOOR KITCHENS



OUTDOOR KITCHENS

With restaurant closures forcing more people to eat at home more often, there's been greater attention placed on kitchen space — both indoor and outdoor.

As of early August, sales of outdoor kitchens have increased by 106% over the past six months, according to retailer Living Spaces. Pizza ovens, built-in wine bars and outdoor eating counter space are particularly popular features.

They also fetch a great return on investment, according to Absolute Outdoor Kitchens, which reports that homes with outdoor kitchens can potentially see an ROI ranging between 100% and 200%, particularly for homes in the Southwest and Southeast.

Kelly Kissman, a Coldwell Banker agent based in Westlake Village, CA, has seen greater demand for small kitchen remodels with bar seating, while Waugh's clients are requesting outdoor kitchen space with full amenities.

"I had one client, a doctor who cooks for her daughters every night in her outdoor kitchen," says Waugh. "I'm not talking about just an outdoor grill — it's more of a true outdoor kitchen with all the bells and whistles."

By moving the kitchen and eating quarters outdoors when the weather permits, homeowners are able to free up more indoor space for school and work activities.

OUTDOOR KITCHENS

“Even if they have dedicated office space and one person is working in the living room,” Kissman says, “eating outdoors avoids family members from running into each other. Also, with everyone home more, it offers a nice change of pace.”



106%

sales increase in outdoor kitchens as of
August 2020 over past **6 months*****

100% - 200%

potential **ROI** on homes with outdoor
kitchens****



A woman with curly hair and a young girl are smiling and working together in a garden. The girl is wearing a pink shirt and blue shorts, and the woman is wearing a purple top. They are surrounded by potted plants, including yellow and red flowers. A red garden trowel is visible in the foreground. The background shows a brick wall and some foliage.

GARDENS



GARDENS

What's America's new pastime now that everyone's spending more time at home? Gardening. People who never picked up a shovel before in their lives are now cultivating the extra yard space around their home into a new healthy hobby.

According to Reuters, U.S. seed company W. Atlee Burpee & Co. reported selling more seed in March than any other time in its 144-year history. Indeed, gardening is enjoying a resurgence worldwide, from Russia, where many have taken up residency during the pandemic in out-of-town cottages with plots of lands to sow their vegetables, to Singapore, a nation that relies largely on food imports.

Not only do gardens yield an affordable fresh food source for the family, they also offer a great activity to do with the kids.

Wahl notes, "We just sold a property with 10 acres featuring a pond, a barn for an RV and a hoop garden, so this family can grow their own vegetables."

Even in yards where the soil may not be hospitable to growing, many homeowners can use raised planter boxes to convert usable outdoor space into gardens.

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POOLS & PATIOS



**SALES
UP**

Pavers
Umbrellas
Concrete Patios
Lanai Space



POOLS & PATIOS

Requests for pavers, umbrellas, concrete patios and lanai space are also on the rise as people find new creative ways to stretch their outdoor square footage into reimagined living space, says Hendricks.

Quentin Dane, co-owner and broker with The Dash Realty Group, Raleigh, NC, explains the new trend as a way for people to find a “staycation” without leaving their homes. “If I’m working from home, I want to be able to go from an office environment to a vacation getaway in my home when I get off work,” he says.

Kissman agrees. “The mindset is ‘If we can’t go to the park, we’re going to create a park at home.’”

Many clients are asking for a pool or an outdoor living area where they can set up a big screen and bring indoor entertainment outside. “I tell everyone your pool is not to swim in,” says Waugh. “It’s just an extension of your living room.”

Indeed, Comey & Shepherd’s Wahl has witnessed a huge demand for pools, though with contractors booked a year out, homebuyers might be better off buying existing pool space rather than trying to build one.

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— **Quentin Dane** Co-owner and Broker
The Dash Realty Group, Raleigh, NC



MORE SQUARE FOOTAGE

**Extra Storage
Outbuildings
& Shop Areas**

**Additional Square
Footage**



MORE SQUARE FOOTAGE

It's a trend that's being echoed coast to coast, from BHHS, New England Properties' Candace Adams, who reports more New Yorkers fleeing the city for isolated, greener areas in Connecticut to broker Daryl Rogers in the Sierra foothills northeast of the San Francisco Bay Area.

"More space with a large yard, large house and a great room — anything that allows space, especially acreage in our rural area is what buyers want now," says Rogers, president of BHGRE | Reliance Partners, Roseville, CA. Many buyers moving out of the Bay Area are looking for additional living quarters to house additional family members in a separate but adjacent living arrangement, he says. Extra storage, outbuildings and shop areas top the wish list of these Bay Area transplants, Rogers notes.

Comey & Shepherd's Wahl is seeing the same trend among Midwestern home buyers willing to push their search radius a few extra miles outside Cincinnati's city limits where they can find larger lots 10 to 15 miles away.

"Today, it's not as important for the kids to be in a certain school district as it once was," she says. "Many are thinking of the move out of the city as a new way of life."

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PARTITIONED PRIVATE SPACE





PARTITIONED PRIVATE SPACE

While the open concept may not be completely gone, more agents are reporting a move to walled and partitioned spaces that lend home dwellers privacy.

Dane says more people are looking for defined spaces with soundproofing features. “They don’t necessarily want houses built in the Fifties, but I’ve heard many people say, ‘My office is right next to the living room, which is right next to the dining area, which is right next to the kitchen.’ That open concept is truly not working for what people need now.”

Joseph Rand, Chief Creative Officer, Howard Hanna Rand Realty, agrees. “I can see people turning away from open floor plans that have been so dominant in recent history,” he says. “Now, people are thinking, ‘I can have some private space in my house where I can close the door and have privacy.’”

Rand has witnessed it personally in his own vintage house, where his living room has now become a “learning pod” for his kids.

Having walls and room to self-isolate is more important than ever.

Plant dividers, book shelves, screens and decorative curtains are a few ways

PARTITIONED PRIVATE SPACE

that can help divide a room into separate livable space. However, if it's soundproofing features your clients need, a more durable partition, such as pocket doors or sliding barn doors, may be more in order. Some acoustic room dividers can also help by absorbing as much as 65% sound.



ROOM DIVIDER IDEAS

Plants

Book Shelves

Screens

Decorative Curtains



OUT

Open floor plans



IN

Privacy within
partitioned spaces

Acoustic room dividers
can absorb as much as

65% sound****



BASEMENTS





BASEMENTS

In those regions of the country where basements are an option, these underground shelters offer infinite possibilities for new homeowners.

“I’m hearing lots of customers looking for basements, where they can work or play but not on the main living floor of their homes,” says Dane.

The ultimate in flex space, basements appeal to homeowners for myriad reasons, from converting the sub-level space into a home office, gym, a home theater or a playroom for the kids. More people are also looking for basements as an affordable compact living quarters for extended family members.

IDEAS for Sublevel Space

Home office

Gym

Home Theater

Playroom

Extended Family

Living Quarters



NEW CONSTRUCTION





NEW CONSTRUCTION

With inventory way down and buyer demand way up, new construction is getting a fresh look among many wannabe homeowners.

New construction offers a turnkey path to homeownership without the multiples, limited inventory options or need for renovation.

As Dane points out, “Families who have to be in their homes 24 hours a day don’t want projects like a bathroom or kitchen remodel staring them in the face all day. With new construction,” he says, “they can get the new features they want without having to engage in a bidding war.”

According to a September Zillow Market Pulse, new home purchases in July were up 36.3% from a year before, and more new homes have been sold through July in 2020 than were sold through the same period in any year since 2007. The sudden increase can be largely attributed to the shortage of available for-sale existing homes, low mortgage rates and a greater preference toward new, never lived-in homes

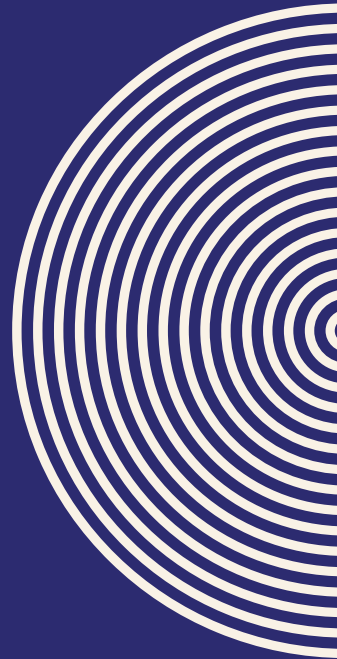
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SOURCES:

*Brookings Institution • **ResearchAndMarkets.com • ***Living Spaces retailer
****Absolute Outdoor Kitchens • *****Screenflex • *****Zillow Market Pulse, Sept. 16



BE the **FIRST** to **OFFER**

Low inventory and hot listing features like the ones above can equate to multiple bids. Certain dotloop features can help expedite the offer and the transaction. Tasks lists, for instance, help organize clients and expedite tasks such as signing an exclusive agreement, getting prequalified and issuing the digital transfer of earnest money.

Teams and brokerages can also help their agents and admins expedite offers by using Loop Templates, an easy way to add prepopulated details using either the desktop or mobile app.

And at any point in the transaction, text Messenger allows agents to share documents, collect eSignatures and make contact with buyers when a fast response is needed in a tight market.

Click here for more tips on

How Agents Can Close Deals with Low Housing Inventory.
